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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

J. B. Department of Agriculture

Monday, November 16, 1931

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Making the Holiday Fruit Cake." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "Rabbit Recipes" and "Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes Revised."

--ooOoo--

"Fruit cake and plum pudding for sale."

That was the sign that drew so many customers to Sally Allen's booth at our club's fair last year. Sally Allen sold every pudding she had on display and every cake large and small, white and dark. And she took orders for dozens more.

"Good fruit cakes are always best sellers at this time of year," said Sally, "whether homemade aprons or hand embroidered table covers sell or not."

I guess tradition has a lot to do with it. Real old-fashioned holiday cake, chock full of nuts and pineapple, citron, raisins and cherries is as much a part of the holiday season as Thanksgiving or Christmas. But for finest flavor it should be baked a month or so ahead and allowed to stand and develop its rich, fruity taste.

A month or so, did I say? And the date today is November what? The sixteenth already? Well, it's high time we were up and baking if we plan to have fruit cake for Thanksgiving. And it's not a bit too early to bake our cake and steam our plum pudding for Christmas 1931.

By the way, either a cake or a pudding will make a welcome and inexpensive Christmas gift for a hard-to-please friend -- the person who seems to have everything in the world she wants and so not care for the trifles we can afford to buy. But she certainly would enjoy a small fruit cake decorated on top with toasted almond strips, cherries and candied pineapple, wrapped in waxed paper or shining transparent cellophane, and backed in a merry red tin box with a bright red bow. A gift like that is as welcome and cheerful as Christmas itself. So when you do your holiday baking this month, plan on a few one and two-pound cakes to give away.

But I'm getting ahead of my story. I meant to talk about making cakes today. Time enough to talk about wrapping them up when it gets toward Christmas.

"What," I said to the Recipe Lady the other day, "what would you say is



the most important part of making fruit cake?"

"Preparing the ingredients," she replied promptly. "Whether you are making the cake to sell, to give away or to serve at home, it pays to use the best of ingredients and to prepare them carefully. Of course, this preparation takes a long time. But it is time well spent. If you are making cake for sale, you can afford to use the finest materials because fruit cake will bring a good profit if it is delicious. A one-pound cake will cost you about forty cents to make and you can sell it for a dollar."

"Buy the best of dried fruit," advised the Recipe Lady, "and be sure it is perfectly clean before you cut it up. Cut the almonds and citron in long slender strips. See the pieces of candied cherries, raisins or pineapple are large enough to be distinguished in each slice of cake, but are not so large that they are likely to tear the cake as it is cut."

"How do you shred the almonds and citron?" I asked.

"The almonds? First blanch them in boiling water, slip off the skins and, while they are still wet, cut them in slender strips. Citron can be shaved in thin slices and then cut in narrow strips. Use a cutting board and a sharp paring knife. As for the raisins, dates or cherries, chop each of these separately in a wooden bowl. Don't use a meat grinder. It makes them too soft and mushy."

So much for preparing the ingredients. The Recipe Lady then went on to tell me of the different kinds of fruit cake. There's rich fruit cake -- the kind that has a pound cake foundation and so contains a good deal of butter or other fat. That kind keeps moist the longest. Then there's simple fruit cake, made the same way but with less fat. Fruit cakes may be either dark or white. Dark cake contains spices, molasses and dark dried fruit. White fruit cake is made with almonds, pineapple and light Sultana raisins. As any of these cakes can be stored indefinitely, it is a good idea to make enough to keep on hand for the whole winter. The spices help preserve the cake. The fruit keeps it moist. The amount of spice or of fruit that you use depends upon your preference.

"That recipe for a medium-rich fruit cake on page twelve of the cook-book," said the Recipe lady --- and of course she was referring to the green radio cookbook --- "that recipe will make a cake weighing from 5 to 6 pounds. Or you can bake it in two small cakes. Following it is a fine recipe for white fruit cake. You'd better tell your listeners about that."

"And tell them also always to use a tube pan -- the kind with the chimney up the center -- when baking fruit cake of any kind. In making a large cake it is especially necessary for the heat to reach the center of the cake as well as the outside so that it will bake evenly."

"Cut out a circle of strong waxed paper that just fits the bottom. Now grease the inside of the pan. Then line it with the waxed paper on both the sides and the bottom. Then grease over the paper. The paper not only aids in removing the cake from the tin but it also prevents the fruit in the cake from scorching during the long baking. Yes, long baking for success, and a very slow oven. The time of baking, of course, depends on the size of the cake. A 5 or 6 pound dark cake takes about 3 hours in the oven."

"Some cooks think that steaming their cakes part of the time and finishing them in the oven makes them especially moist. But that method means a lot of extra time and work. You can have just as delicious and moist a cake if you use the right recipe and bake it in a slow enough oven."

"How do you know when the cake is done?"

"You test it just as you do every other cake. When it is done, fruit cake shrinks away from the sides of the pan. That's one test of doneness. Another is that good old-fashioned test of inserting a clean broom straw or smooth toothpick in to the center. There are special cake testers in the market, too -- or you can make use of your long discarded hat pin by scouring it. If the tester comes out clean with no sticky batter adhering to it, you can be safe in removing the cake from the oven.

"Turn the cake out of the pan on a rack to cool. When it is cold, store it away in a tight tin box, leaving the waxed paper still on. Old-fashioned housewives always packed half an apple away with the fruit cake to keep the cake moist. When the apple began to mold or spoil it was removed and another put in its place. The cake must also be watched for signs of mold."

Some other day soon we'll talk about plum pudding. There's a fine recipe for that as well as for fruit cake in your green cookbook.

What do you think the Menu Specialist has planned for us today? A rabbit dinner. Domestic rabbit meat or wild rabbit may be used for this meal. And she suggests that if you are interested in a different and economical Thanksgiving dinner this year, you might like a rabbit dinner for Thanksgiving. I never heard whether the pilgrim forefathers up in New England caught wild rabbits as well as wild turkeys, but I shouldn't be a bit surprised.

Anyway here's a menu. It is suitable for a company meal this time of year, or a Sunday or Thanksgiving dinner.

Rabbit en casserole; Baked sweet potatoes; Brussels sprouts or some other green vegetable; Diced tart apple salad with malaga or tokay grapes; and for dessert, Spiced suet pudding, or Steamed fig pudding.

The recipe for the casserole of rabbit is in the rabbit leaflet. Do you own a rabbit leaflet? If not, I'd be pleased to send you one. Domestic rabbit meat when properly prepared is as delicate as chicken. The leaflet contains many different ways of preparing this meat. Think it over. If you feel inclined toward a rabbit dish for Thanksgiving, let me send you the leaflet "Rabbit Recipes." It's number is

The directions for making steamed fig pudding are on page 94 of the green cookbook.

Once more. Let's repeat that menu before I go. Rabbit en casserole; Baked sweet potatoes; Brussels sprouts; Salad of diced tart apple and grapes on lettuce; and Spiced suet pudding or steamed fig pudding for dessert.

Tomorrow: "Hints on Dusting and Decorating."

